



Implementation of the Turnaround With Increased Learning Time (TILT) Model: Final Evaluation Memo

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Introduction

This report has been developed by American Institutes for Research (AIR) for the Boston Public Schools (BPS). The report evaluates the results of BPS's implementation of the Turnaround With Increased Learning Time (TILT) model at selected district schools.

Since fall 2012, BPS has collaborated with the National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL) to apply the TILT model in two low-performing Boston middle schools. The BPS-NCTL collaboration has been supported by a federal Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) development grant, and AIR is conducting an external evaluation of the program implementation and outcomes. This document is the last of three annual reports that have focused primarily on educators' experiences with and perceptions of TILT, with an emphasis on improving both the model and, more generally, the process of implementing expanded learning time (ELT) in BPS.

BPS's i3 grant has allowed its two participating middle schools—McCormack Middle School (MMS) and Washington Irving Middle School (Irving)—to substantially increase the amount of time students spend in school by adding 300 hours of instruction to the school year with the goal of improving educational outcomes. The TILT model articulates specific ways in which the additional instructional time is to be spent, including academics, teacher planning, and extracurricular activity; but it also provides some degree of flexibility in terms of how these practices are implemented. Student outcomes at the conclusion of the second year of TILT implementation suggest that the program has been successful overall in increasing student achievement.¹ However, the quantitative data available for this evaluation do not show which elements of TILT contribute to its overall success, nor do the data indicate how sustainable implementation is with regard to student and teacher buy-in. We have investigated these aspects of the model through interviews and focus groups with teachers, administrators, students, and external providers at both schools twice each school year since the beginning of school year (SY) 2012–13 (i.e., fall 2012, spring 2013, fall 2013, spring 2014, and fall 2014).²

The examination of TILT participant experiences and perceptions is particularly important to inform future ELT planning in BPS. Although SY 2014–15 is the final year of the i3 TILT grant, BPS has invested heavily in ELT, increasing the school day by 40 minutes in 15 BPS schools for SY 2015–16, with the plan of expanding the day in 60 BPS schools by SY 2018–19. Both MMS and Irving are part of the initial cohort of schools that will add time. Each school will submit a plan for the expanded day, with plans to be approved by a district task force. In approving plans, the task force will take into consideration lessons learned from the TILT project. This report, therefore, focuses on the aspects of an expanded day that educators perceive as having the most value for students, as well as challenges and barriers they have faced in implementing an expanded day through TILT. We conclude with recommendations for overcoming these challenges in the ongoing implementation of ELT.

¹ See Citkowitz, Haynes, Hallberg, and Therriault (2014).

² For a detailed description of data collection and analysis methods, see Kistner, Haynes, Hallberg, and Therriault (2013).

Promising Elements of the Expanded Day

The two primary aspects that educators at the TILT schools identified as particularly beneficial to students were access to more academic instruction and access to a range of extracurricular activities that would not otherwise be available to them. There also appeared to be several promising practices at both schools relative to structures that groups of teachers created to provide continuous instructional support through both the core day and the expanded day. Some of the partnerships that schools had formed with outside organizations to support the extended day had also developed into promising structures to support students. Across all of these potentially positive aspects of TILT, the following themes emerged:

- It is important for students to perceive expanded time as a seamless part of the whole school day, with activities for which participation is mandatory and graded.
- Relative to creating a seamless schedule for students, it is important for the school's academic departments to collaborate to provide a comprehensive and consistent academic experience.
- It is important that all students have time for physical activity at some point in the day, even if they do not participate in a physical elective or enrichment activity. They should also have some opportunities for social interaction with one another.

These three features appeared to be essential to the success of the TILT model's most promising elements. Each element is described in greater detail below.

Students receive more academic instruction and have access to a range of extracurricular activities in a protected, supervised environment.

Educators in multiple focus groups at both MMS and Irving reported during the fall 2014 data collection that one of the most positive aspects of TILT has been students' access to additional instruction. This finding has been consistent throughout our evaluation, in company with the finding that educators value the additional time afforded to students through enrichments to explore a wide variety of activities to which they might not otherwise have access.

Additional academic instruction is delivered primarily through academic leagues. Both schools have taken steps over the course of TILT implementation to make their academic leagues more beneficial to students. First, they have provided some academic league courses earlier in the school day to make them a more seamless element of students' expanded day experience. Second, to ensure that students approach the courses seriously, students receive grades for their academic league courses and are expected to attend them just as they would any other course. Finally, the schools have worked to offer more targeted academic interventions in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics for students who struggle in either area, including working more closely with outside partners to ensure that their curricula are consistent with teachers' expectations. One member of a school leadership team said of the academic league component, "We cannot lose period six [i.e., the academic league period] the way it's looking. It's just such an incredible extra hour for our kids."

Educators' perceptions of the enrichment period appear to be more mixed; but in general, most respondents have described it as a wonderful opportunity for students who might not otherwise have access to such a broad mix of extracurricular activities. In particular, respondents emphasized the positive aspects of the apprenticeship programs. Said one educator, "[We are] giving kids an opportunity to see different things, to visit Google, to go to different places. That's different than just buying into a culture of a school; it's about seeing what could potentially be in your future. It's about seeing what is beyond your four walls." Other programs that have been noted as particularly beneficial include the dance and performance enrichments, sports, and enrichments that enhance social-emotional learning.

Relative to both the academic leagues and the enrichments, however, the key appears to be student placement, and this is an issue with which administrators at both schools have grappled since the beginning of the TILT program. It is important that students receive the right academic intervention and that they are placed in enrichment activities that engage them. The perception among educators is that student placement has improved, with the majority of students placed in appropriate academic interventions each semester based on results from a number of tests, including Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS, for entering students), ANET, and Reading Inventory and Scholastic Evaluation (RISE), for example. Most students are also placed in enrichments that are among their top three choices. These systems are not yet perfect, however; some educators noted that there are still students who struggle with the expanded day and who are not receiving the support they need.

One ad hoc solution that has emerged independently in different grade levels at each school involves teachers who have teamed to provide both core and expanded day instruction to the same groups of students. This configuration is not a defined part of the TILT model, but it appears to work well within the model (with appropriate supports) and has been perceived very positively at both schools. It is described in greater detail below.

In some cases, groups of teachers have created structures to provide interventions to students that target their academic needs.

In each school, one group of teachers has formed a collaborative group to provide targeted, continuous instruction to their core day students throughout the core and extended instructional periods. At Irving, the group is composed of Grade 8 teachers who serve grade-level students, including those with disabilities (most of the teachers are certified to serve students with disabilities). This group formed during SY 2013–14 and has continued into SY 2014–15, although some teachers are no longer teaching during the extended day. At MMS, a group of four core content teachers formed at the beginning of SY 2014–15 to provide academic league instruction to students from their core day classes, with a focus on topics in ELA and mathematics that represent particular challenges to their students. Each of these groups provides flexibility for students, who can move among teachers as their needs evolve. Another advantage noted by educators is that students receive their academic intervention solely from licensed teachers.

Teachers who are not part of these grade-level groups have created other ad hoc structures to provide more seamless support to students throughout the academic portion of the core and extended day. For example, teachers at both MMS and Irving have described teaming with other teachers to provide sheltered content instruction to English learners in core content areas such as

mathematics and social studies. Other teachers have developed collaborative relationships with the outside providers who provide instructional support to their schools, and both schools have adjusted the course of TILT implementation to build stronger, more focused partnerships with these organizations. These partnerships are described in the next section.

Partnerships with outside organizations have become stronger and more beneficial to students and staff.

Partnerships with outside organizations are key components of the TILT model, but they have required time and effort to develop. Over the course of TILT implementation, both schools have worked to refine these relationships to be more beneficial and productive. In SY 2013–14, both schools had fewer, more focused partnerships defined by higher levels of collaboration than in previous years. Multiple respondents noted that having fewer partners has decreased the schools’ management burden and improved the quality of outside services.

Increased partner engagement in planning meetings and school-level professional development is another developing improvement. One partner, City Year, provides direct support to teachers in both core and expanded day classrooms, building relationships with students. Another partner, Citizen Schools, provides instruction to students during the expanded day. Citizen Schools coplans with the core day teachers, aligning core and expanded day curricula so that students receive structured instructional support.

As noted above, each of these promising aspects of TILT is mediated through (1) continuity of the core and expanded day so that students perceive the school day to be seamless; (2) collaboration among adults so that students experience consistency in instruction; and (3) opportunities for students to engage in physical or social activity. The challenges experienced with TILT implementation have largely occurred when these features have been absent or insufficient.

Challenges

There have been consistent improvements in TILT implementation at MMS and Irving, but challenges remain. This is particularly true relative to the continuity of services throughout the day and to the structure of students’ time, which leaves little room for physical activity or socialization. Students and teachers alike have experienced burnout as a result of the expanded day. Each challenge is described in greater detail below.

During each year of TILT implementation, lack of continuity from the core day to extended time has been a challenge.

According to most staff, there is still a break between the main school day and the extended time in terms of student and staff perceptions. A teacher who discussed the problem of a less-than-smooth transition from the core day to extended time said, “It could be some of the structural issues, the fact that it [i.e., ELT] is tacked on at the end of the day and it still doesn’t feel to [students] like it’s a core class.... It could be that there’s sometimes a disconnect between some of the ELT teachers and the core teachers.” Students’ perception that the day ends at about the time most core day teachers leave contributes to behavior problems that plague the last hours of the day. One teacher said, “I’m getting a lot of complaints from other teachers about our students’

behavior last period, behavior that we don't see for the most part during the regular day.” Behavior issues may also make the final periods less effective and productive for all students because greater instructor focus must be given to classroom management.

Some of the promising positive elements of TILT discussed above have been implemented to address the continuity issue. For example, some academic leagues occur earlier in the school day to avoid an abrupt schoolwide shift from core to expanded day, and students receive grades for their expanded day instruction and activities. There have also been efforts by groups of teachers to collaborate with one another and with outside providers to enact a more seamless day in terms of instruction and behavioral expectations. However, these efforts have not been sufficiently systematic or widespread to counteract students' perception that there is a difference between the core and expanded day, perhaps because fewer certified teachers are on-site after the core day. The reduced presence of certified teaching staff has also led to challenges around services for students with special needs.

There has been progress in supporting English learners and students with disabilities during the extended day, but supports remain inconsistent.

The reduced number of certified teachers on-site during the expanded day means that partner organizations are largely responsible for providing ELT instruction and other support for students. The partners have made efforts to increase the support they are able to provide for English learners and students with disabilities, although such support is generally beyond partners' staff capacity. Students with disabilities in Tenacity at MMS are given additional assistance by a Boston College volunteer. In addition, Tenacity teachers attend all IEP meetings and abide by special accommodations needed by those students during the academic league time. City Year staff strive to deliver assistance beyond that typically provided but still observe that the students they support at MMS “need higher levels of intensive support” than they are trained to offer.

Although partners have made efforts to provide additional supports to students with disabilities and English learners, these supports are much more limited and less consistently applied by partners than they are by certified specialists during the core day, and during extended time, additional supports are not always offered to students with special needs. For example, many English learners receive sheltered English instruction (SEI) during the core day, but additional supports are not offered to them during the extended day at MMS (with the exception of a single certified teacher who supports SEI for one grade). One specialist noted that opportunities for collaboration between ESL specialists and academic league teachers was lacking: “I don't necessarily know what's being taught to all of my students during [academic league], and they're probably working on some really interesting things that I could...support, and it could just be that we don't have the schedule to sit down and talk about it. That would help, so we can build on to what we're already...doing.” In addition, eighth grade English learners at MMS were put into a lower grade academic league class “because they were forgotten about at the beginning of the year” and they were not able to be added into their own grade's academic league classes. Even staff on the leadership team acknowledged “there's not really that much particular support for students with disabilities or [English learners]” during the academic leagues.

At Irving, many English learners receive their ESL services during the academic league block instead of participating in an academic intervention. Some higher level English learners are

integrated into the eighth grade academic leagues with SEI-certified teachers. According to leadership team staff at Irving, most resource room students with disabilities are integrated into an academic league class, though specific supports provided for them during that period were not apparent. An Irving teacher who has students with disabilities said that the paraprofessional providing support in the classroom leaves at 1:20 p.m. This contractual ending time means that additional support is available in that classroom for only the first 15 minutes of the academic league block, which runs until 2:24 p.m.

When discussing the types of support that should be made available to students with special needs, one administrator said, “We need a fuller embrace of the mission of helping those students with an extended day; and the other thing is we need some activities that are actually more designed for them, to help them engage.” Another leadership team staff member said that a larger team of trained, certified BPS teachers assigned to ELT would reinforce the value of the extended day by improving both the quality of programming available to all students and the support that students with special needs receive.

These issues of continuity are exacerbated by the increased potential for student and teacher burnout due to the extended day, which affords little time for teacher collaboration or student physical and social activity.

Despite longer school days, staff at MMS and Irving continued to perceive a lack of adequate time for planning and collaboration. In addition, staff at both schools expressed concern that students lacked sufficient time for physical movement, socializing, and homework.

Staff voiced frustration over lost time that might otherwise have been dedicated to planning, collaboration, and work with students outside of class. One teacher, speaking about the amount of collaborative planning that occurs beyond contractual work hours, noted that “I don’t know how that [i.e., lost time] still is the case because we have this extra time on Friday, and yet still so many people do that coplanning...on [their] own time.” Collaboration among teachers who share students during the core day and academic league time is also scarce. Collaborative meetings must take place during off hours because it is not allotted for during contracted time. Specialists who teach English learners and students with disabilities also spoke about the difficulties of finding time to collaborate. “You make the best of the time we have there, but if it was a little bit longer, for me personally anyway, because I do feel like sometimes I need to better collaborate with some of the [general education] teachers. I would desire more time.”

Teachers, partners, and administrators also noted that the longer school day means that students have little time for homework. One teacher said, “I’ve had to lower my expectations of what to give for homework; it has to be very minimal if I expect to have it returned.” To address this, homework time has been inserted into some enrichment offerings, and students who are struggling academically may be placed into a tutoring or homework help enrichment for a few days each week. In addition, an emerging theme that staff mentioned during recent site visits is that the extremely full schedule leaves students with little time to move around and engage in physical and social activity, thus diminishing their opportunities to develop important social skills. As one teacher described, “I just feel like sometimes adults think about what they want, and we want test scores up, but we’re not thinking about what [the students] want; like, they want to

run around, to socialize, their life is built around the socializing that they do in school.... It needs to be a little balanced.”

Conclusion

This report identifies a number of promising aspects of TILT and details some of its challenges. Most important, it appears that successful implementation of ELT requires that extended time be a seamless part of the school day rather than an add-on; that teachers have opportunities to collaborate in order to make instruction between core and intervention classes consistent; and that students have access to some unstructured time to socialize and to engage in physical activity or movement. With these elements in place, the expanded day can be quite promising for students, who have access to additional academic instruction and new extracurricular activities. The following recommendations emphasize these elements in the context of ongoing ELT implementation:

- **Build continuity.** Continue to implement practices that make the core and expanded day feel like a single, coherent school day for students. This can be accomplished by scheduling ELT activities earlier in the day and by making them mandatory and graded. Among students, the most visible indicator that the expanded day has begun is the reduced presence of certified teacher staff. This reduction also poses hardships for students with special needs. To the extent possible, build staff schedules so that teachers provide services for students for the full day.
- **Encourage adult collaboration.** Ensure that teachers have the supports they need to collaborate in order to develop cohesive, comprehensive curricula for core and expanded day instruction. These supports include time to collaborate within grade levels and departments as well as with specialists and academic league instructors. Monitor structures that teachers have developed to collaborate, such as the grade-level groups described in the Promising Elements section, above. If these structures appear successful and sustainable, consider implementing them more systematically on a schoolwide basis. Continue to build strategic partnerships with outside organizations, with a focus on support for teachers.
- **Provide unstructured time.** Reduce structured time during the day to incorporate breaks for students to socialize and move around. Ensure that teachers also have unstructured time for collaboration and planning.

Finally, successfully implementing a major shift in time culture requires time, patience, and support from a broad variety of stakeholders, including district and school staff, parents, and the community. The TILT schools in BPS have made significant progress over the three years of the i3 grant; but continued and ongoing support is necessary to overcome the many challenges associated with this time of change.

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